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Little White Thought

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The Little White
Thought *A Fan-
tastic Scrap by*
Miles Malleson

PWR

C.

The Little White Thought

C.

The Little White Thought
*A Fantastic Scrap by Miles
Malleeson*

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TO THE
LITTLE WHITE THOUGHT
AND THE CHILDREN OF THE ACADEMY OF
DRAMATIC ART, FOR WHOM IT
WAS WRITTEN, WITH
MY LOVE

*1

1023635

THE LITTLE WHITE THOUGHT

was first produced at Wyndham's Theatre on the afternoon of Tuesday, March 30th, 1915, at a Special Performance by the Students of the Academy of Dramatic Art, with the following Cast:—

The Thought of Somebody Else's Wealth	Miss NANCY GORING.
The Thought of the Actual Present	Miss ENID KILBURN-SCOTT.
The Thought of Beauty . . .	Miss IVY EDWARDS.
The Thought of the Girl He Loves	Miss FABIA DRAKE.
The Thought of Other People's Suffering	Miss FANNY DEITZ.
The Thought of Traditional Beliefs	Miss DOLLY NEAVE.
The Day Dreams	Miss DELA POINTER.
A little Thought that has Just Been Born	Miss ESTELLE DESMOND.
The Spirit of Eternal Growth .	Miss ELSPETH DOUGLAS-REID.

The play produced by Helen Hays.

Incidental music by Norman O'Neill.

THE LITTLE WHITE THOUGHT

A FANTASTIC SCRAP

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

THE THOUGHT OF SOMEBODY ELSE'S WEALTH.

THE THOUGHT OF THE ACTUAL PRESENT.

THE THOUGHT OF BEAUTY.

THE THOUGHT OF THE GIRL HE LOVES.

THE THOUGHT OF OTHER PEOPLE'S SUFFERING.

THE THOUGHT OF TRADITIONAL BELIEFS.

THE DAY DREAMS.

A LITTLE THOUGHT THAT HAS JUST BEEN BORN ; and
THE SPIRIT OF ETERNAL GROWTH.

Each costume should be quaint and distinctive, and a little un-human.

The movements, gestures, and bearing of each Thought, too, should be distinctive throughout.

The scene is inside a man's mind.

It is a semi-circular chamber hung in rich black curtains. The floor is of the black of the curtains, and rises at the back in several broad steps, conforming to the semi-circle of the curtains. The light in it is of a clear transparent blue-grey, lending an air at once of mystery and space.

Alone on the stage, a quaint, formless little being, with two enormous eyes quaintly reminiscent of spectacles, is ceaselessly and industriously running up and down the steps, muttering figures to itself as it runs.

It is THE THOUGHT OF SOMEBODY ELSE'S WEALTH.

THE THOUGHT OF SOMEBODY ELSE'S WEALTH.

Two and two make four, and six makes ten—and five makes fifteen. Three and carry one. (THE THOUGHT *shifts its course slightly on the steps, and starts, as it were, upon another column.*) . . . And carry one. One and ten make eleven, and three makes fourteen, and ten is twenty-four. Four and carry one. (*Another shift.*) And one and ten is eleven, and five's sixteen. Sixteen pounds, four shillings, and thruppence—I wonder if that's right!

(*And the little being goes over it again, and then starts on another sum. Through the curtains, down stage, audience R., enter two others. A tall, dignified figure, leading by the hand a tiny, tiny one, not quite sure of its own shape.*)

THE THOUGHT THAT HAS JUST BEEN BORN.

(*Rather like a little child on a bank-holiday trip—a tiny, pleading voice.*) Please, when are we going to get there?

THE SPIRIT OF ETERNAL GROWTH.

We are there, little one. We are there in the Mind of a Man, where you are to live till I come and fetch you.

THE THOUGHT THAT HAS JUST BEEN BORN.

Please. When are you coming to fetch me? And who are you? And what am I? I don't seem to know anything about anything.

THE SPIRIT OF ETERNAL GROWTH.

You've only been born about two and a half seconds, and we've travelled from the other side of space—so *that's* not surprising ! No new-born thought knows very much about itself, but you have only to be—and you will grow. You will find many little companions here—and when I come again you will be the greatest of them all.

THE THOUGHT THAT HAS JUST BEEN BORN.

But, please, when will you come again and fetch me ? I'm frightened.

THE SPIRIT OF ETERNAL GROWTH.

I am The Spirit of Eternal Growth, little one. I came here twenty years ago, as men reckon, and brought many little thoughts, as new and as timid as you, to live and grow in this little space, and I shall come again a few years on and take them away. Men call me Birth and Death—they know so little. But when I come I must take them all away just as I find them to live in a more beautiful, far grander room. For that is Death. The passing from home into larger home, these Thoughts that are a Man, until they dwell in Infinity and understand it. Little Thought that has Just Been Born, you are my very own ; the dearest one of all my little ones, the Thought of me, and so The Thought of the Purpose of Life.

THE THOUGHT THAT HAS JUST BEEN BORN.

But I don't see any companions—except *him*—and I don't think I should like him.

What's he keep running up and down for ? And what's he so busy at ?

THE LITTLE WHITE THOUGHT

THE SPIRIT OF ETERNAL GROWTH.

He's not one of mine. Men bring them here themselves. The man whose mind you are in is a bank clerk. He's working now. That is The Thought of Somebody Else's Wealth.

THE THOUGHT THAT HAS JUST BEEN BORN.

Is he wicked ?

THE SPIRIT OF ETERNAL GROWTH.

No. Merely useless. Men are so foolish.

THE THOUGHT THAT HAS JUST BEEN BORN.

Are there any wicked ones ?

THE SPIRIT OF ETERNAL GROWTH.

Yes. They live in a room below.

THE THOUGHT THAT HAS JUST BEEN BORN.

Oh, please ! Must I stay here ? I want to come back with you. Back beyond Time—where the quiet is so beautiful that it sings to you.

THE SPIRIT OF ETERNAL GROWTH.

There is no need to fear, my dearest. The Wicked Thoughts would all like to come here—but they *can't* while you are here. It is only when the room is empty that they creep up—you must never let them. It's a terrible business, turning them out when once they get in.

THE THOUGHT THAT HAS JUST BEEN BORN.

Oh, look ! There's one.

(A very matter-of-fact little chap pops in on top of the steps, and makes a shrill announcement rather like a herald. THE THOUGHT OF SOMEBODY ELSE'S WEALTH hesitates on its monotonous journeys.)

THE THOUGHT OF THE ACTUAL PRESENT.

Quarter to one. I wonder if they'd notice if I chucked it now and went out to lunch! . . . Better not.

(And he disappears through the curtains. The THOUGHT OF SOMEBODY ELSE'S WEALTH recommences up and down.)

THE THOUGHT THAT HAS JUST BEEN BORN.

Oh! who was that one? I liked him. Mayn't I go and play with him?

THE SPIRIT OF ETERNAL GROWTH.

You won't find that one has much time to play. He's the busiest of the lot because he's always at it. He is The Thought of the Actual Present—and has to manage things. At least he tries to—though he sometimes has dreadful trouble with The Day Dreams who simply won't do what she's told.

THE THOUGHT THAT HAS JUST BEEN BORN.

Look, there he is!

THE SPIRIT OF ETERNAL GROWTH.

Ah! he's getting busy; then there are sure to be some others about.

THE THOUGHT OF THE ACTUAL PRESENT.

(Always with his shrill announcing voice and his jerky, decisive little movements.) I believe my watch is slow. . . . I'm sick of sitting here.

(THE THOUGHT OF SOMEBODY ELSE'S WEALTH begins to find his task very difficult. He hesitates, stops, starts again, retraces his column, and is generally perturbed. A beautiful, graceful figure glides through the curtains.)

THE THOUGHT THAT HAS JUST BEEN BORN.

Look ! Oh, there's a lovely one !

THE SPIRIT OF ETERNAL GROWTH.

The Thought of Beauty.

(THE THOUGHT OF SOMEBODY ELSE'S WEALTH rushes headlong from the stage, down L.)

THE THOUGHT OF BEAUTY.

See how the sun shines in through the windows ! Oh, the warmth of it ! See how its light touches the new green of that baby leaf, that quivers and whispers to and fro, bathed in the great blue beyond !

THE THOUGHT OF THE ACTUAL PRESENT.

(Bustling on.) I shall take my sandwiches into the park.

THE THOUGHT OF BEAUTY.

Oh, the feel of Spring in that ray of sunlight, and the dancing leaf ! The mystery of Eternal Youth is out over the world to-day.

(A little White Thought, radiant with Happiness, joins them.)

THE THOUGHT THAT HAS JUST BEEN BORN.

(Breathless with joy.) Oh, mother! How beautiful!

THE SPIRIT OF ETERNAL GROWTH.

That is The Thought of the Girl He Loves.

THE THOUGHT OF THE GIRL HE LOVES.

I wonder if I shall see her to-day! Oh, I must! It's *her* day. The world is looking and singing to-day what looks and sings from her eyes and her voice every day.

(Another Thought steals in, and puts its hand into the White Thought's hand.)

THE SPIRIT OF ETERNAL GROWTH.

I thought so. That is The Day Dreams Thought. They are so often together—those two.

THE DAY DREAMS.

Perhaps I'll meet her in the park, and she'll smile. And we'll sit on a seat together and I'll touch her hand—and she won't take her hand away—and her fingers will close round mine. Warm and close. And we'll look at one another—just a little look—because other people will be about and nobody will guess—but there will be just us—sitting there, loving—nobody will know. We shall be alone among all the people in the park.

THE THOUGHT OF THE ACTUAL PRESENT.

(Suddenly.) I must get on with these beastly accounts.

(THE THOUGHT OF SOMEBODY ELSE'S WEALTH rushes back again, and commences headlong up and down the steps—muttering frantically. The other Thoughts shrink away and disappear. However, he doesn't work unmolested very long. The little white figure of THE THOUGHT OF THE GIRL HE LOVES steals gently round a fold of the black curtains and stands at the head of the steps. THE THOUGHT OF SOMEBODY ELSE'S WEALTH struggles and stops, crouching on the bottom step.)

THE THOUGHT OF THE GIRL HE LOVES.

All across the tapestry of my life, the shining thought of *her*. A gleaming, golden thread: interwoven, twisted, twined by little fairy fingers.

(*The White Thought stops, and THE THOUGHT OF SOMEBODY ELSE'S WEALTH makes a desperate dash up and down, but has to give it up as the White Thought starts again.*)

THE THOUGHT OF THE GIRL HE LOVES.

She had her hair done differently last night. . . . Why wouldn't her mother leave us alone? . . . Silly old idiot! . . . No tact! . . . How beautiful she looked! Oh, the wonder deep down in her eyes, so timid, and yet so sure and full of hope! Why won't the months go by? I'm afraid. . . . Oh, my dear, my dear!

THE THOUGHT OF BEAUTY.

(*Who has joined the White Thought.*) Look at the Spring out there through the windows. You and the world are young—and all's before you.

THE THOUGHT OF THE GIRL HE LOVES.

I know—I know. And I've got to sit here for two more years until I earn enough to have my home.

THE THOUGHT OF BEAUTY.

Hark at those birds singing in that old tree with its new leaves! Building their nest and singing just out of pure joy! Joy for the light, and life and love!

THE THOUGHT OF THE GIRL HE LOVES.

Don't be so cruel.

THE DAY DREAMS.

(Hand in hand with the White Thought.) If I need never come back to this old office any more! We'd meet outside—she and I—and we'd walk right away—out of the town—out to the songs of the birds and the embrace of the fields; and our hearts would sing—all through the golden days, and the steel-blue nights, for the joy of life and love. And we'd go abroad where the foreigners live and it's always warm.

THE SPIRIT OF ETERNAL GROWTH.

Oh dear, oh dear!! A little backward there, I'm afraid!

THE DAY DREAMS.

And everything would be new and strange, and wonderful. And yet we'd always be alone—we two—alone in a crowded world.

THE THOUGHT OF SOMEBODY ELSE'S WEALTH.

(Quite cross, and stung suddenly into speech.) I wish to goodness you'd let me get on with my work. You're

only making yourselves miserable—talking such nonsense.

THE THOUGHT OF BEAUTY.

It's not nonsense. Look out of the window and breathe.

THE THOUGHT OF SOMEBODY ELSE'S WEALTH.

I've got no time for looking out of the window. What's the use of that? Now I *am* some use, I am. I mean MONEY.

*(And he regularly plunges up and down the steps.
The Thoughts scatter and disappear.)*

THE SPIRIT OF ETERNAL GROWTH.

It's so sad. These aliens!!! They think they own the place. Oh, but they do such a lot of harm! They stop my own children from growing.

THE THOUGHT OF THE ACTUAL PRESENT.

(A sudden appearance.) That's done. Hurray! Bang goes the ledger, and up and out into the park! One hour of freedom at least.

*(THE THOUGHT OF SOMEBODY ELSE'S WEALTH
disappears finally. THE THOUGHT OF THE
ACTUAL PRESENT withdraws.)*

THE THOUGHT THAT HAS JUST BEEN BORN.

They've all gone. Where've they all gone to?

THE SPIRIT OF ETERNAL GROWTH.

He's just hurrying along great stone corridors and out of the building—and the Thoughts are idle. There

are some minds in which the Thoughts never rest. Ah! How they grew then! So strong and beautiful! But this is the more usual.

THE THOUGHT THAT HAS JUST BEEN BORN.

When are they coming back? And when may I go and speak to them?

THE SPIRIT OF ETERNAL GROWTH.

Very soon, dearest of all. When I am gone. But first, listen. You have seen some of my own children—The Thought of Beauty; The Thought of the Girl He Loves; The Day Dreams—and there are many more. You have seen one of the Thoughts—not of mine—but that men put into their own minds—The Thought of Somebody Else's Wealth—and he's not nearly as bad as The Thought of One's Own Wealth; and also there are many more of those, too. And I have told you of the Wicked Thoughts. Remember, remember always, little Purpose of Life, that I am leaving you in charge of the Thoughts that I brought here, and that soon I shall take away. They are all very tiny, as yet, and very ignorant. They are just beginning to know themselves, to enjoy themselves. Teach them to know and to enjoy each other. Teach them, little Thought of me, to work together, and to grow, so that when I come again they may be ready. I have told you I must take them away just as I find them. Because in here is all that is immortal of a man, his Thoughts as he has allowed them to grow, and if they aren't big enough for their new home they are so ashamed. It won't be easy. There must be

no letting go—no giving up hope—or the Wicked ones will come ; but you will have the most bother here, I think, with all the useless ones—if men only knew. But you must do your best in spite of them.

THE THOUGHT THAT HAS JUST BEEN BORN.

(*Very, very solemnly.*) Please. I *will* do my best.

THE SPIRIT OF ETERNAL GROWTH.

No Thought can do more.

(THE THOUGHT OF THE ACTUAL PRESENT *enters.*)

THE THOUGHT OF THE ACTUAL PRESENT.

I'll cross the road here and go in at that gate.
How fast these 'buses go ! . . . Run !

THE THOUGHT OF BEAUTY.

That's good ! Oh, what a sparkly day ! A deep breath, and you feel happy to the tips of your toes.

(*Now that THE THOUGHT OF SOMEBODY ELSE'S WEALTH is not about, the Thoughts are quite at ease when they are not speaking, and remain grouped about on the black stairs.*)

THE THOUGHT OF THE GIRL HE LOVES.

I hope she's happy. I wonder what she's doing now !

THE DAY DREAMS.

Out in the little back garden. With her old blue blouse on. Her sleeves rolled up and all open at the neck, so the little winds can kiss her. Cutting the lawn with big scissors, so that we can have tea on it next Sunday.

THE THOUGHT OF THE GIRL HE LOVES.

I can see her—oh, so plainly now ! Half close my eyes and I could touch her.

THE THOUGHT OF THE ACTUAL PRESENT.

(*Loud and sudden.*) Great Scott ! . . . Oh, I beg your pardon, sir, I didn't see you ! . . . Silly idiot ! . . . Why didn't the man look where he was coming to ?

THE THOUGHT OF BEAUTY.

What a big blue cap the world has on ! And look at that little white cloud on its back. Like a baby in its bath.

THE THOUGHT OF THE ACTUAL PRESENT.

By Jove, that was a pretty girl ! She smiled at me. . . . I wonder . . . is she going to ? Yes, she turned round.

(*A new Thought comes on. The lines of its dark costume are severe.*)

THE THOUGHT THAT HAS JUST BEEN BORN.

Look ! I haven't seen that one before.

THE SPIRIT OF ETERNAL GROWTH.

That is The Thought of Traditional Beliefs.

THE THOUGHT OF TRADITIONAL BELIEFS.

You should *not* have turned to look at that young person.

THE THOUGHT OF THE GIRL HE LOVES.

Oh, but she wasn't nearly so pretty as . . . *her* !

THE THOUGHT OF TRADITIONAL BELIEFS.

That doesn't matter. You should not have noticed. You're engaged. Your life must be hers—and hers only.

THE THOUGHT OF BEAUTY.

Nonsense! Beauty is always good. Her eyes were beautiful.

THE THOUGHT OF TRADITIONAL BELIEFS.

I call it the thin end of the wedge.

THE SPIRIT OF ETERNAL GROWTH.

What an obstinate, quarrelsome little fellow he does get! He and Beauty so often want the same things, but he *will* have everything his own way.

(Yet another Thought appears.)

THE THOUGHT THAT HAS JUST BEEN BORN.

There's another. . . . Mother, it makes me feel sad—but the look in its eyes is beautiful.

THE SPIRIT OF ETERNAL GROWTH.

Yes. That is The Thought of Other People's Suffering. Oh! if she could but grow to her full here and in the minds of all men—she would change the world.

THE THOUGHT OF OTHER PEOPLE'S SUFFERING.

Look at those men sleeping on the grass. Ragged and tired and hopeless. How ugly! But nobody seems to care.

THE THOUGHT OF TRADITIONAL BELIEFS.

The last shall be first and the first last. Some day they will have their reward. Anyhow, I'll give one a penny now.

THE THOUGHT OF BEAUTY.

(*Indignant.*) Don't give them money—give them life.

THE THOUGHT OF TRADITIONAL BELIEFS.

I'm afraid you're a revolutionary !!!

THE THOUGHT OF BEAUTY.

Of course I am. With all this ugliness about.

THE THOUGHT OF TRADITIONAL BELIEFS.

Never mind about beauty. Be *Good*. You're a danger to society.

THE THOUGHT OF BEAUTY.

I should hope so. And you're a narrow-minded old stick-in-the-mud.

THE SPIRIT OF ETERNAL GROWTH.

Quarrelsome. Quarrelsome. Little one, go and speak to them.

(*Very timidly the little Thought goes up to the two angry Thoughts, and very timidly joins their hands.*)

THE THOUGHT THAT HAS JUST BEEN BORN.

Beautiful and good. It is the same thing.

(And then, suddenly being seized with a fit of shyness, it runs back and hides its face in its mother's skirts.)

THE THOUGHT OF BEAUTY.

I beg your pardon.

THE THOUGHT OF TRADITIONAL BELIEFS.

Not at all, my dear lady. I was to blame.
(They shake hands.)

THE THOUGHT OF THE ACTUAL PRESENT.

Hark! the band. Listen! . . . Hurray! The Fluffy Flapper Waltz instead of all those classical fellars they played yesterday.

THE SPIRIT OF ETERNAL GROWTH.

Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear!!! That's the sort of thing that happens when The Thought of Somebody Else's Wealth is so often about. It'll all have to be learned some day—somewhere—if they won't here. But it's such waste of time.

THE THOUGHT OF THE ACTUAL PRESENT.

Here's a nice seat in the sun. I'll sit down. . . . How warm! I'll close my eyes.

(Then slowly a faint flood of colour begins to fill the room.)

THE THOUGHT THAT HAS JUST BEEN BORN.

Mother, what is it ?

THE SPIRIT OF ETERNAL GROWTH.

Ssh, dear ! Sleep is coming.

THE THOUGHT THAT HAS JUST BEEN BORN.

What is sleep ?

THE SPIRIT OF ETERNAL GROWTH.

The Thoughts' playtime. I must go. I have other minds to visit. To set free the thoughts from some. Go and join them, little one. Kiss me good-bye. (*The Little Thought puts up its face with puckered lips, and she stoops and kisses the little one lovingly.*) And this is my last word to you. This. Teach them to live that they may learn to live.

(*And slowly mounting the black steps she passes beyond the curtains. Ray after ray of soft colour diffuses itself into the room. The little figures grouped on the black steps begin to grow gradually indistinct. Very, very softly music seems to float amid the mists of light.*)

THE THOUGHT OF THE GIRL HE LOVES.

How infinitely far the deep skies seem ! Up and up and up. Oh ! the thought of her makes me yearn up to the heavens, to sink back into her arms with all the tangled stars about us. (THE LITTLE THOUGHT THAT HAS JUST BEEN BORN joins the group. It goes up to each of the Thoughts, and as it touches them they speak. First to THE THOUGHT OF THE GIRL HE LOVES.) Why is all this wonder of loving ?

THE THOUGHT OF BEAUTY.

Why is Beauty—so beautiful ?

THE DAY DREAMS.

All my dreams can't be for nothing.

THE THOUGHT OF OTHER PEOPLE'S SUFFERING.

If I might do something to lessen the world's suffering !

THE THOUGHT OF TRADITIONAL BELIEFS.

Go away ! Go away, little man !!! All this questioning. It's *unsettling*.

(Flood after flood of colour, and the music swells. The Thoughts can be heard singing softly to it. And quite vague and indistinct now, they mingle and move in a kind of dance figure. Above them, on the top step, is seen THE WHITE THOUGHT OF THE GIRL HE LOVES, with arms upstretched, outlined against the black of the curtains. Then as its form is visible through the ever-growing riot of colour, its voice rising clear above the music, it is heard to speak.)

THE THOUGHT OF THE GIRL HE LOVES.

O my love, my love, my love !

(And the whole picture fades into darkness.)

(Curtain.)

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